

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, IS, LE, PLO
SUBJECT: TERROR AND REPRISAL OPERATIONS DERAILED ALIGNMENT'S
OPPOSITION CAMPAIGN

REF: TEL AVIV 2438

1. SUMMARY: JUST WHEN THE ALIGNMENT WAS BEGINNING TO TAKE
ADVANTAGE OF THE PUBLIC'S GROWING CONCERN OVER INTERNAL
PROBLEMS, THE TERRORIST ATTACK ON THE TEL AVIV-HAIFA
HIGHWAY RETURNED THE PROBLEM OF ISRAEL'S SECURITY TO CENTER-
STAGE. THE ALIGNMENT HAS JOINED THE NATIONAL CONSENSUS
IN SUPPORT OF THE GOVERNMENT'S ACTION, FOR THE TIME-BEING
REFRAINING FROM CRITICISM OF THE HANDLING OF THE
TERRORIST RAID AND THE GOI REPRISAL. BEGIN CONTINUES TO
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BENEFIT FROM AN OPPOSITION THAT HAS NOT SHIFTED MENTALLY TO THAT ROLE
.
END SUMMARY.

2. AS WE HAVE RECENTLY REPORTED, THE DEFLATION IN
PEACE HOPES HAD BROUGHT PUBLIC CONSCIOUSNESS TO FOCUS
PRIOR TO MARCH 11 ON THE CONTINUING ECONOMIC PROBLEMS

AND NEGLECTED SOCIAL ILLS. THE STIRRING OF NEAR DORMANT OPPOSITION WAS SEEN IN THE ALIGNMENT'S FIRST CONCERTED ATTACK ON THE GOVERNMENT FOR THE ALLEGED FAILURE OF ITS NEW ECONOMIC POLICY AND THE LACK OF ANY PROGRAM FOR DEALING WITH LABOR UNREST, LOW IMMIGRATION, POOR HOUSING, CRIME AND THE POVERTY OF THE "SECOND ISRAEL". OBSERVERS WERE BEGINNING TO COMPARE THE CURRENT DOMESTIC SITUATION WITH THE MALAISE OF THE CLOSING MONTHS OF RABIN'S ADMINISTRATION. "WHAT HAPPENED TO THE PROMISES AND 'NEW BROOM' OF THE MUCH-TOUTED, FRESH, ENERGETIC LIKUD GOVERNMENT?" THE ALIGNMENT SEEMED AT LONG LAST TO BE COMING UP WITH AN ISSUE (OR ISSUES) TO SINK ITS TEETH INTO AND WHICH WOULD RESCUE IT FROM THE UNFAMILIAR AND UNCOMFORTABLE POSITION OF CRITICIZING THE GOVERNMENT ON PEACE NEGOTIATIONS FROM THE RIGHT.

3. THEN CAME THE BLOODY SATURDAY OF MARCH 11 AND THE SUBSEQUENT INCURSION INTO LEBANON. CONCERN OVER THE ECONOMY AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS ONCE AGAIN TOOK A BACK SEAT TO PREOCCUPATION WITH SECURITY--THE ALL-PERVASIVE ISSUE SINCE THE STATE WAS FOUNDED. THE LABOR PARTY, AND, TO A SLIGHTLY LESS DEGREE, MAPAM RALLIED AROUND THE GOVERNMENT AS PART OF THE SPONTANEOUS NATIONAL CONSENSUS TO HIT BACK AT THE TERRORISTS AND WIPE OUT THEIR BASES. MAPAM ENDORSED THE MILITARY ACTION AND TO DATE HAS DIFFERED WITH GOVERNMENT POLICY ONLY IN ITS EMPHASIZING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THE IMPORTANCE OF AN EARLY WITHDRAWAL FROM LEBANON. ON THE OTHER HAND, LABOR PARTY LEADERS NOT ONLY APPLAUDED THE IDF OPERATION BUT, BY THEIR PRONOUNCEMENTS, SEEMED TO BE STIFFENING THE GOVERNMENT'S RESOLVE AGAINST WITHDRAWING BEFORE EFFECTIVE ARRANGEMENTS ARE MADE TO PREVENT THE RETURN OF THE PLO TO SOUTH LEBANON. MOREOVER, WHILE THE GOVERNMENT SEEMS RECONCILED TO MAKING WAY FOR A UN FORCE, PERES AND RABIN HAVE EXPRESSED STRONG OPPOSITION TO RELIANCE ON THE UN FOR SECURITY AGAINST PLO RAIDS.

4. THUS FAR, THE ONLY INDICATION OF LABOR PARTY DISSENT FROM THE GOVERNMENT'S ACTIONS WAS A STATEMENT BY PERES AT A MEETING MARCH 20 OF LABOR MKS. HE HINTED AT OPPOSITION BY HIS PARTY IN THE FUTURE BY DECLARING THAT AS LONG AS ISRAELI MILITARY OPERATIONS ARE IN PROGRESS, THE KNESSET SHOULD REFRAIN FROM CRITICIZING THE GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF THE MARCH 11 TERRORIST ATTACK AND ISRAEL'S MILITARY REPRISAL.

5. COMMENT: THE ALIGNMENT'S NASCENT ATTEMPTS AT EFFECTIVE OPPOSITION HAVE BEEN DERAILED BY THE TERROR AND COUNTER TERROR ATTACKS OF THE PAST TEN DAYS. THE ALIGNMENT

SEEMS TO BE VOLUNTARILY PASSING UP AN OPPORTUNITY TO CALL ATTENTION TO WEAKNESSES IN ISRAELI PLANNING AND EXECUTION. AS ONE COALITION MK (YOSEF TAMIR) PUT IT. " THE ALIGNMENT IS TOO FAIR FOR ITS OWN GOOD." THE LABOR PARTY IN PARTICULAR HAS NOT YET LEARNED HOW TO ACT AS AN OPPOSITION. LABOR PARTY LEADERS SPEAK AND PERFORM AS IF THEY HAVE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE GOVERNMENT. THE CONTRAST WITH THE BEGIN-LED OPPOSITION TO PRECEDING GOVERNMENTS CANNOT BE MORE STRIKING. FOLLOWING VIRTUALLY EVERY PREVIOUS TERRORIST ATTACK BEGIN WAS ABLE TO FIND SOMETHING TO CRITICIZE IN THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE. OBSERVERS CONTINUE TO MARVEL AT BEGIN'S GOOD FORTUNE IN HAVING THE WELL-BEHAVED ALIGNMENT AS HIS OPPOSITION.

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